Wars of the Roses: The Real Game of Thrones (Very

Tristan Clark

VISIT...

A Very Short History

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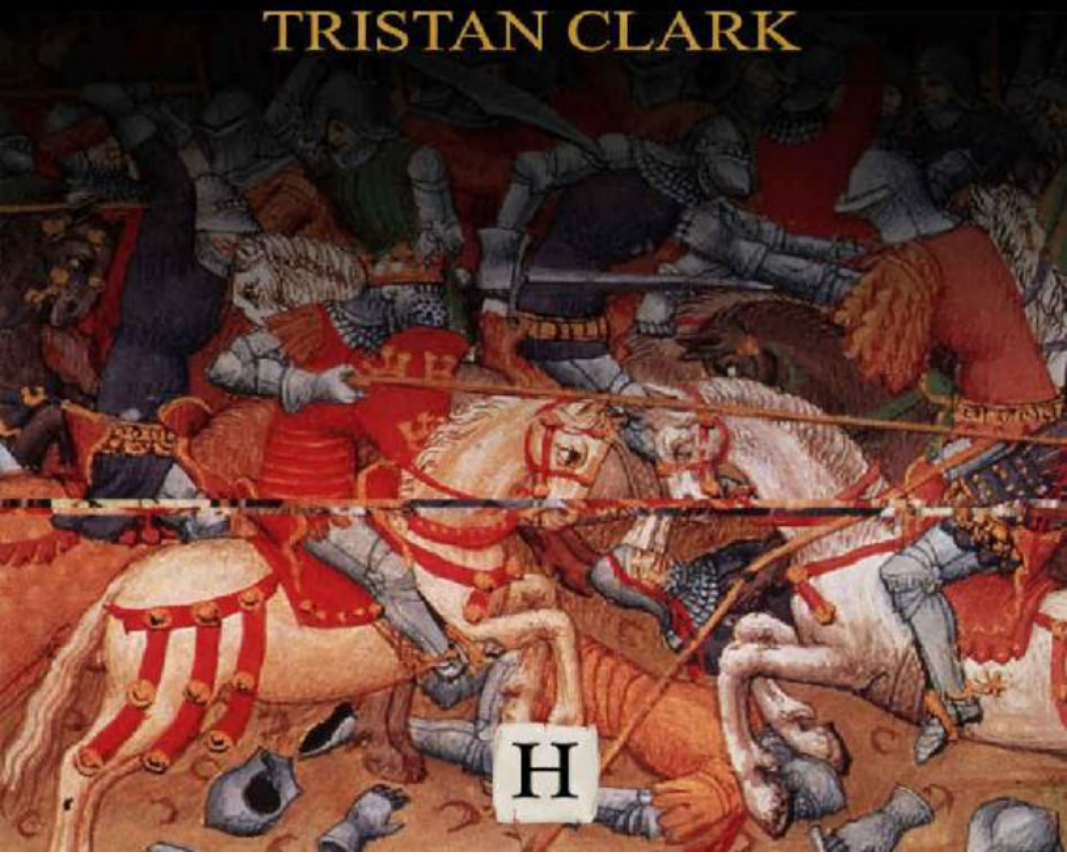
THE REAL GAME OF THRONES

TRISTAN CLARK



WARS OF THE ROSES: THE REAL GAME OF THRONES

A Very Short History

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CONTENTS

Key Figures

Introduction

1. Henry IV and the Rise of the Lancastrians

2. Controversies, Rivalries, and Grievances

3. The Duke of York Has Done This, With His Followers

4. To Ireland and Back

5. England Plunged Into Civil War, A York Becomes King

6. Richard III

7. Henry Tudor

About the Very Short History Series

Key Figures

Listed by House, in chronological order:

The House of Lancaster

Edward III (1312-1377): Edward sits at the top of the Plantagenet family tree. He is listed under the Lancaster line, but is the patriarch of both the Lancasters and Yorks. He served as king for 25 years and was—notably—known for warfare, waging the Hundred Years War and providing an arena for medieval knights to win their glory.

Philippa of Hainault (1314-1369): She married Edward III at age thirteen and bore several children. She was popular with her countrymen, known as benevolent and compassionate.

John Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1340-1399): The third son of Edward and Philippa, John Gaunt was a major catalyst in the events immediately preceding the War of the Roses. He was a *de facto* ruler of England during Richard II's minority rule, and his ancestors would form the House of Tudor.

King Henry IV (Henry Bolingbroke) (1366-1413): Son of John Gaunt; Bolingbroke mounted a coup against Richard II and was then banished from the kingdom; when Gaunt died soon after, the crown seized the Lancastrian estates. This precipitated Henry's second attempt to seize the throne, which was successful. His insanity late in life saw him pass his crown to his son, Henry V.

King Henry V (1387-1422): Son of Henry IV and Mary de Bohun, King from 1413 until 1422. He was a key figure in the Hundred Years War. Upon his death, the crown went to, his infant son, Henry VI.

Catherine de Valois (1401-1437): Henry V's wife, and Queen of England from 1420 until 1422. She was the daughter of Charles VI of France. Her illicit marriage to Owen Tudor (see below) would bring the Tudor line into the Lancaster line, and would forever change the course of English history.

Owen Tudor (ca. 1400-1461): This controversial figure was a member of the Household of Queen Catherine de Valois at the time of the death of Henry V. He entered into what was at the time a secret marriage with her and they produced three children, including Edward Tudor, the father of Henry, who would become King Henry VII.

John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset (1403-1444): Grandson of John of Gaunt,

son of John Beaufort, Marquess of Somerset, and Margaret Holland. He was a rival of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later King Richard III. He was disgraced by being replaced as regent of France by the Duke of York. His death was thought to be a suicide.

King Henry VI (1422-1471): The son of Henry V and Catherine de Valois was crowned an infant King. Most of his rule was incompetent and he was largely a puppet ruler for his wife Margaret of Anjou and various governors such as the Duke of Suffolk and the First Duke of Somerset. His mental incompetence paved the way for a chaotic set of attempts on the crown by the Duke of York.

Margaret of Anjou (1430-1482): Controversial wife of King Henry VI who played a big role in policy and war strategy during his rule.

Edmund Beaufort, First Duke of Somerset (1406-1455): Keeping track of the Beauforts/Somersets can be a bit tricky, with Edmund being alternately labeled the first and second Duke of Somerset. He was the son of John, Marquess of Somerset, and brother of the above John, Duke of Somerset. He was prominent during the reign of Henry VI, an ally of Queen Margaret's whose bunglings in the conflicts in Burgundy would spur York to his rebellion. He died in the battle of St. Albans

Edmund Beaufort, Third Duke of Somerset (1438-1471): Son of the above Edmund, another key military leader of the Lancastrians. Captured and killed after the route at Tewkesbury.

Jasper Tudor (1431-1495): Uncle of Henry Tudor, who played a fatherly role in his life. Fought at the Battle of Bosworth.

Henry Tudor, King Henry VII (1457-1509): The man who would begin the Tudor dynasty, victor of the Battle of Bosworth.

The House of York

Richard II (1367-1400): Grandson of Edward III, son of Edward, Prince of Wales ("The Black Prince") and Joan of Kent. His tempestuous rule as boy king was the fertile soil in which the War of the Roses was planted.

Richard, Duke of York (1411-1460): One of the most fiery figures in the Wars, a passionate leader with a hidden desire for the crown. He had royal blood on both sides of his family—his father, Richard, Earl of Cambridge, was the son of Edmund of Langley, one of Edward III's sons; his mother, Ann Mortimer, was descended from Lionel of Antwerp, another of Edward III's sons.

Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury (1400-1460): Salisbury wasn't a blood

member of the Yorks but was the brother of Cecily Neville, wife of Richard, Duke of York. He was an effective warrior, serving as a valuable aid to York during his armed attempts at the crown.

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick (1428-1471): The son of Salisbury was one of the most controversial figures in the Wars. His prosperity and connections helped propel Edward IV to the crown, but he soon turned against his man and became one of his major enemies.

Edward IV (1442-1483): Son of Richard, Duke of York and Cecily Neville, one of the few effective kings during the War of the Roses era. His rule was marked by few of the Wars' battles or challenges to his crown, mostly coming from Warwick.

Richard York, Duke of Gloucester/King Richard III (1452-1485): Served as a right-hand man to his brother Edward, fighting in battles against forces led by Warwick. He became King after almost certainly killing Edward V, his brother's heir. His death at Bosworth Field spelled the end of the War of the Roses.

George York, Duke of Clarence (1449-1478): George was the middle brother between Edward and Richard. He was convinced by Warwick to fight against his brother.

Edward V (1470-ca. 1483): Prince Edward was the son of Edward IV and technically King of England from April 1483 until June, when Richard was crowned. He is known as one of the Princes in the Tower.

Richard, Duke of York (1473-ca. 1483): Sixth child of Edward and Elizabeth Woodville, and the second Prince in the Tower.

John de la Pole, 2nd Duke of Suffolk (1442-ca 1492): His father was the infamous Duke of Suffolk, a councilor of Henry VI's and close ally of the Queen's, but he fought on the side of the Yorks; he married York's daughter Elizabeth;

Those Outside the Bloodline

Henry Percy, First Earl of Northumberland (1341-1408): Involved in a rebellion against Henry IV that predated the Wars proper; killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury.

William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk (1396-1450): Married his way into aristocracy and became a councilor of Henry VI's, later betrayed and executed.

William, Lord Hastings (ca 1430-1483): After becoming a famed warrior

under King Edward IV, he was knighted and married Katherine Neville, sister of Richard. He fought alongside Richard III, but plotted against him; he was killed in the Tower in 1483.

John Howard, Duke of Norfolk (1425-1485): One of Richard III's closest associates and military leaders; slain by an arrow at the Battle of Bosworth, before Richard's death.

Henry Percy, 4th Earl of Northumberland (ca 1449-1489): One of Richard III's chief supporters, a combatant at Bosworth Field, imprisoned by Henry VII.

Introduction

Contemporary historians will tell you that the bloody feuds of fifteenth century England wouldn't have been called the Wars of the Roses at the time. The two factions in the war, branches of the Plantagenet line, took roses as their family crests: red for the House of Lancaster, white for the House of York. But that motif, scholars believe, was the least of the worries of the combatants and the general public at the time, as the country lurched from one conflict to another.

It was a time of chaos, when the wars between these sides nearly tore apart a nation. First, these were struggles for political capital in the court of Henry VI, but soon they became bloody conflicts for the crown itself.

The War of the Roses was not just a series of sixteen battles over a period of thirty years. They were also a set of intrigues lasting a century, made up of strategic marriages, shifting alliances, betrayals, schemes, and assassinations. No examination of the Wars can do them justice without laying bare the dynamics leading up to the first "proper" battle of 1455, and the Battle of St. Albans.

This book adopts a broad scope, endeavoring to overview all the major factors contributing to and as many facets as possible of the Wars of the Roses. It's a story of greed, lust for power, loyalty, disloyalty, courage, cowardice, and above all, an earnest desire to lead a people.

1. Henry IV and the Rise of the Lancastrians

Two men in armor faced each other. In the noon sun, their various plates must have looked like everyday manufactured implements. Henry Bolingbroke could see the dents on the Duke of Norfolk (Thomas Mowbray)'s breastplate, while Norfolk counted the rivets on the pauldrons that arced across the top of his enemy's chest. He'd taken a second to note the elaborate dress of Bolingbroke's horse, a green velvet caparison emblazoned with swans, Bolingbroke's personal crest. They were in the tiltyard, but this was no tournament. In the tradition of the day, these two men would fight to settle a serious grievance, possibly even to the death.

The one who concerns us the most is Bolingbroke, a fair-haired, handsome young man with a maple tree's torso. The son of one of the wealthiest men in England, John Gaunt, of the Lancaster line of Plantagenets, Henry was schooled in all the day's most prestigious languages. He was a dancer and jouster—he had learned his lessons well.

Would his life end today? If so, would it be a death of glory? He was an early fifteenth-century nobleman after all, already created Duke of Hereford. It was the age of jousts, of aiming a lance at another man's body the way one might lace up high-top sneakers and squeak onto a basketball court today—in search of status and high regard.

He was to tilt at Norfolk to decide which of them was guilty of treason. The King was Richard II, himself no avid warrior but a patron of the arts who is said to have invented the handkerchief. Having taken the throne at a young age, by 1397 he was ruling as a despot, seemingly mentally ill and hurling charges of treason on a whim. Bolingbroke and Norfolk had both been members of a group called the Lords Appellate. Sometimes taking up arms to do so, these men pushed for a list of improvements they thought Richard should make to his government. In addition, they'd used their force and influence to convince him to confiscate the property of a magnate named Richard De Vere, a favorite of the king.

Naturally, the King had little use for these Appellates. Mowbray went to Bolingbroke to warn of Richard's plans to ultimately ruin them. This got back to the King, and in his presence, Bolingbroke called Mowbray's rumors an act of treason. Mowbray shot back with his own charge of treason, and Richard said the matter would be adjudicated by a panel of Lords. Their judgment was that it should be settled in battle, and that brings us to the September afternoon at the tiltyard in Coventry.

And the dramatic events of that joust, we'll unspool shortly. But the events leading up to it serve as a good illustration of life in English society in the second half of the fourteenth century and the early part of the fifteenth, when the houses of Lancaster and York fought each other for the throne on battlefields, in tiltyards, at the marriage altar, and in stuffy cells in the infamous London Tower.

In the mid fourteenth century, England still had a feudal society with tremendous class stratification. The Catholic Church was becoming a unifying force, and a typical philosophy was that just as God set the planets in orbit around the Sun, he also ordered human societies, placing some to be at the bottom, tilling the soil and paying pensions to Lords, in exchange for protection from enemies; some near the top, wielding influence to make their lives more comfortable; and royalty at the very top, all too often indulging their base desires and perverse notions.

The magnate was a wealthy landowner who, during the fifteenth century, would grow rich on the spoils of the Hundred Years War and who would invest in emerging industry. Noted historian Alison Weir explains that these feudal land owners would command enormous networks of estates, peopled by peasants bound by contract to serve them. These men also raised private armies with which, by mid fifteenth century, Weir writes, they were "holding the countryside to ransom by bribery, extortion and violence, and subverting law and order by intimidation and threats." The noblemen commanding these armies were dubbed by Lord Chief Justice Fortescue "over-mighty subjects" of the King, whose rule they were supposed to respect.

In addition to these private armies, some of the magnates also had claims to the crown due to their bloodlines. The first of the Plantagenet Kings was Edward III, who reigned for what would soon seem an amazing fifty-year span, 1327-77. He was ambitious and aggressive, a man of war and exploits. His death threw the nation into chaos by opening up a chaotic question of inheritance, which would drag on for more a century.

Edward had fathered thirteen children, five of them sons, who became landed magnates (in fact, they were the first English Dukes). However, the selection of one of their number as Edward's heir was not a simple affair. Edward's heir was his eldest son, Edward of Woodstock, Prince of Wales, who was dubbed "the Black Prince." He died a year before Edward did, and this left his son Richard of Bordeaux, Richard II, to succeed to the crown, which he did in 1377. He would die without any heirs, leaving the door open for a panoply of Lancasters and Yorks to contest the throne.

But the chaos didn't wait for Richard's death. It often exerted itself during the minority rule of a boy king, who was just ten years old when he came to

the thrown. A regent is usually named to rule in the King's name, and in this case, it was John of Gaunt, father of Henry Bolingbroke. But powerful men close to the King, his uncles or cousins, often felt that a boy king wasn't a real king, and that they themselves must step in and rule. As outlined above, the magnates felt they could exert influence due to their legions of loyal workers and their private armies. In the case of Richard, the Lords of Appellate were the first threats. Though for periods of time he rose above their influence, his impetuous impulses would push things to a head.

The entire court was in attendance at the tiltyard. Women were wearing gowns and wielding plastic fans, as gossip hissed through the crowd. The steeds pawed the dirt, the two combatants rippling their jaw muscles. It was time to begin. Each man saw a flash of silver, the king's baton, heaved into the loamy dirt, halting the joust before it had begun. Richard announced he needed to deliberate, and the men presumably waited on their horses for the two hours it took him to do so. When he returned, he announced that the two strapping knights would be exiled from his kingdom, Norfolk for life, and Bolingbroke for ten years.

Exile in the Middle Ages was a quirky, paradoxical state of affairs. Many of the figures with whom we'll be dealing experienced exile at one time or another, whether for months or for years. Because of the person's station in life, he was usually taken into the palace of a member of royalty or nobility in the country of exile. There, he lived a life of leisure, though taken in as a sort of property by his benefactor and being estranged from his family.

It was a lifestyle that Bolingbroke seemed prepared to bear with stoicism, when he learned of a much larger affront. Newly appointed Duke of Lancaster before his exile, Bolingbroke left behind immense wealth and land. Not long into his time abroad, he learned that the petulant king had revoked the letters patent that kept the properties legally in Bolingbroke's hands and had gone so far as to sequester his estates. Breaking the law by re-entering a country from which one was exiled was an easy choice when it was necessary for Henry to take back all that had been his. Further, gaining support was very possible, since, as Anthony Cheetham writes, "No man could feel safe when the laws of inheritance could be so arbitrarily flouted."

Bolingbroke arrived in England and quickly began massing his supporters. These included the Archbishop of Canterbury and with him, the Church. By the time he rolled into London, he was a populist hero and was able to oust Richard and imprison him in The Tower, at some point deciding that simply securing his inheritance paled in comparison to taking over the nation. In a nutshell, this is how the Lancastrians ousted the Yorks from the kingship, beginning a rather lengthy rule.

Henry was crowned King Henry IV on October 13, 1399. He was large of stature, flush from thrashing his enemy after escaping exile, and ready to prove himself on the battlefield as a king, just as he had as a crusader. Not surprisingly, the first direct challenge to his rule, which he'd taken through usurpation, arrived swiftly. A rebel army made up of Thomas Mowbray, son of the late Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Northumberland, Owen Glendower, Edmund Mortimer, and the Archbishop of York (Richard Scrope) not only colluded with one another to carve up England, but posted a list of grievances against Henry IV on the doors of prominent churches. These accused Henry not only of usurping the throne, but of murdering Richard and of levying taxes he'd promised to repeal.

Henry was as effective in quashing uprisings as he was taking the throne in the first place. Mowbray and the Archbishop were swiftly captured and the supporting cast eliminated. The two ringleaders were executed, and that was the end of the rebellion. It also instigated the beginning of the end for Henry IV. Dramatically, he was struck with some mystery disease less than twenty-four hours after the execution of Archbishop Scrope—he attributed this to God punishing him for his wrath. Henry IV died on March 20, 1413, leaving not only a male heir, Henry V, but one who, at age 26, had already been involved in governing. He was crowned King on April 9, 1413.

Henry V oversaw a stable, largely successful rule, one that history largely remembers for the Hundred Years War. A former warrior of the crusades, Henry plowed through Normandy and France deliberately, laying siege to major cities and sometimes overseeing the slaughter of non-combatants, including women and children. He drastically built up England's holding of French lands. By 1420, he controlled Normandy, Brittany, and Burgundy. On May 21 of that year, having subdued France with his military might, he signed the monumental treaty making himself and his heirs the successors of then-King Charles VI. He was now the legal commander of a sizeable empire.

He married Charles's daughter Katherine Valois, who would become the mother of Henry VI. In 1422, he fell ill during battle, assailed by fever and dysentery. He died on September 1, leaving business with France unfinished. He'd depleted much of the treasury in executing the war, had angered France, and left a country with divided public opinion as to the war. He also left all of this in the hands of an infant son, the nine month-old Henry VI.

2. Controversies, Rivalries, and Grievances

The last time England had been under minority rule, it had been the York, Richard II. Now, the Lancasters had been in power for just over two decades, having scored major victories during that time, and keeping the country under tight control. The advent of another child king, Henry VI, was sure to cause chaos. During the rule of Henry VI, a series of problems and disagreements, as well as opportunities and unfortunate circumstances, aligned in a way that led inexorably to the violence that would later be dubbed The Wars of the Roses.

Situations must be driven by people, and four key personages were behind some of the earliest developments, so it makes sense to organize the discussion around each of these people and their conflicts.

William de la Pole, Fourth Earl of Suffolk

Recall John of Gaunt, the patriarch of the Lancaster line. His first son, by Blanche of Lancaster, was Henry IV, one of whose sons was Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. His second son was John Beaufort, Marquess of Somerset. These two men were avid rivals under the rule of the malleable boy king, and in 1425, the situation came to a head. Each was convinced that the other was about to enact a coup against Henry VI, and they met at London Bridge to do battle. They were talked down by Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pedro, Prince of Portugal, a guest of the King at the time. In short, this led, under the supervision of John, Duke of Bedford, to an agreement that all involved would submit to counciliar rule, obeying the Lords of the Council and the King.

Thus the Council was validated, and took its place as the rule of the land under a King who hadn't yet reached majority age. However, even when he did reach the age of fifteen and presume to rule on his own, Henry VI relied heavily on his councilors. He was known to be lukewarm on governmental matters, much more passionate about religion. He seems to have been contemplative, quiet, and pious, astute and firm in his convictions but not the kind of swashbuckler that Henry VIII would later be, nor the warrior his grandfather had been. He was a perfect candidate to be pulled in the directions of various power-hungry men.

One of these was William de la Pole, Fourth Earl of Suffolk. He'd come into this title when his brother became one of many fatalities in the Hundred Years War at the battle of Agincourt. He went on to serve in battles under Henry V, including a loss against Joan of Arc's army in 1429. After this debacle, which

saw him captured and then ransomed, he returned to London and began to rise through society. He did so, according to Middle Ages historian Dan Jones, "through a combination of boldness, good fortune, excellent connections and old-fashioned stealth." He married Alice Chaucer, dowager countess of Salisbury, and got into a social circle that included Cardinal Beaufort and Catherine de Valois, and was appointed to the royal council in 1431.

Before long, he achieved a bigger plumb assignment when becoming a member of the royal household. This meant, as the title implies, personal contact with the king every day. Jones writes, "Suffolk became, in effect, the main channel for official contact with the King." Margaret Paston, matron of a middle class family who would later become famous because of the wealth of information they afforded future citizens through their personal letters, wrote that unless "ye have my Lord Suffolks (sic) good lordship, while the world is as it is, ye can never live in peace."

Richard, Duke of York

When he attended council meetings, Suffolk would have rubbed elbows with an ambitious man of slight build named Richard, Duke of York, or Richard York. He descended from Edward III's second son, Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence. Around this time, he'd established himself as an owner of significant property, not only throughout England, but also in Ireland and Wales. Alison Weir states that his claim to the throne may have been seen by Henry VI as a bit too strong for him to be given a place in government, so he was used in a military fashion.

His role in the saga, at least in the early 1430's, is one of a malcontent, one who frequently feels slighted. He wasn't thrilled at being left out of an expedition to Gascony, and began to find this injury insulting. Henry VI found a way to frequently renege on York's annuity, which he needed to furnish his own salary and to pay his soldiers. Despite his pleas, the payments didn't arrive, and this wealthy landowner found himself pawning a gold collar of his own to pay his expenses.

A chief rival of York's was the Lancaster John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. Under Henry VI, it was clear that Somerset was the favored military man and statesmen. His payments were on time, and larger than York's. Once these resentments and rivalries popped up, as we will soon see, they not only festered, but brought infection to multiple generations.

Margaret of Anjou

Margaret of Anjou became Queen of England upon marrying Henry VI. Legend has it that a description of her body convinced Henry (a devout Christian) to ship her over and to arrange the marriage. She is known to be

beautiful and statuesque, as well as confident and outspoken.

A major division in the King's court centered around whether or not to make peace with France. Not surprisingly, Margaret was on the peace side of the issue, and that will receive more detail below. But in general, it didn't take her long to realize, just as Suffolk and others had, that Henry left a bit of a vacuum by not being very assertive and by devoting so much of his energies to the religious aspects of his life.

Weir explains how the presence of the Queen escalated the rift between various sparring rivals: "From the first Margaret identified herself vigorously with Beaufort's party, in the belief that she was helping her husband… Automatically placing herself in opposition to Gloucester and York, she thus, probably in youthful ignorance, made enemies of them both."

Exacerbating her adversarial relationship with York was the fact that she was also friendly with his nemesis, Somerset. It was partly on his advice, filtered through Margaret to the King, that York was recalled from Normandy in 1445, which meant being without the power to govern a land of his own, a job at which he'd given great passion and had acquired some glory. Not surprisingly, his replacement overseas was none other than Somerset himself.

Events involving philosophical differences concerning France soon conspired to bring these various rivalries and animosities closer to a boil. In autumn of 1445, Rene of Anjou implored Henry to cede the territories of Anjou and Maine, which the King had agreed to do in an earlier treaty. Margaret (Rene's niece) tried to convince her husband to comply. Eventually, Henry put in writing his agreement to surrender these territories. But incomprehensibly, he did this as a secret between himself and the French, not publicizing it in England or even clarifying the position to his military in these areas. When an evacuation did take place, it caused another explosion within the council's factions: the Duke of Gloucester blamed Suffolk for ordering this sudden withdrawal on his own and began to publicly criticize him. This drew him the ire of Suffolk, Somerset, and the Queen.

Their method of knocking Gloucester off was to accuse him of spreading rumors that Suffolk and the Queen were lovers. Gloucester was imprisoned and died in his cell two weeks later. The death didn't seem to be either murder or suicide.

But its effects were significant. Gloucester had been a leader of the opposition party and had very real popularity. His death meant that York was on an island as the voice of critique. It also made him the heir to the crown until Margaret bore a son, the royal couple not having been in a hurry to produce offspring. Now York had little choice but to consider even more seriously his rights to the crown after Henry's death. Whether it was a matter of sheer

favoritism or his opposition to the succession of Maine and Anjou, he wasn't favored among councilors, much less likely to receive royal sanction for a bid to the crown.

Cardinal Beaufort died in March of 1447, leaving Edmund, the second Duke of Somerset, as the family leader. This meant that the King's party leadership was Suffolk and Somerset, with York their adversary. With this imbalance, Margaret wasted no time embracing increased power, sending out proclamations in parallel with all that the King sent out. Suffolk and Somerset needed her approval for all matters, prompting Weir to assert, "It could therefore be said with some truth that an eighteen-year-old girl was effectively ruling England."

Whether the Queen was to blame, the nation soon fell into severe turbulence. The powers of the magnates and a state of quasi-anarchy was creating increasing domestic unrest. At one point, Henry VI found a way to appoint two men to one post, the stewardship of the duchy of Cornwall, thus precipitating a bloody, protracted feud between the two families that escalated to murder. The public blamed Henry and the Queen for lawlessness throughout the land, frequently mocking them both.

Things were much worse in France. Somerset was put in charge there, having replaced York. The situation was deteriorating, with periodic skirmishes breaking out, when he decided to ambush the village of Fougeres, pillaging the fortunes of its wealthy merchants. This earned a retaliation from France for which Somerset and his men were not ready. Charles VII launched a colossal attack on the English holdings in Normandy, formally declaring war in July and knocking out roughly thirty walled cities in the region within weeks. When Normandy's capital, Rouen fell, rather than valiantly fighting in the chivalric spirit, Somerset fled.

England had no more presence in Normandy, and was in serious debt for their failed efforts. The public was disgruntled and very thin on patience. The scapegoating tournament thus began, with Adam Moleyns, bishop of Chichester, being one early target. He was a close associate of Suffolk's who had served many years in an administrative capacity and could be blamed for some of the failures in France. He was stripped of his duties, and had so angered Cuthbert Colville, a military captain, that Colville murdered Moleyns before the disgraced bishop could leave the country. A rumor shot through the land that Moleyns used his dying words to scapegoat Suffolk for all that had gone wrong in England. The public was receptive to this notion.

Suffolk was vulnerable, and would soon lose the support of the king. Suffolk arranged a marriage between his son and Margaret Beaufort, aged just seven at the time, the niece of Somerset. This appeared to indicate a coup against

Henry, arranging for Suffolk's son to take the crown.

On January 26 of 1447, Suffolk was impeached and arrested and locked into the Tower. The charges were not only colluding with France on their invasion of England and ceding Maine and Anjou unilaterally, but also of plotting to depose the King himself. Henry decided he would be the one to deliberate over these charges, which he did for a full lunar cycle. He added some of his own charges, and yet, probably at the urging of the comely Margaret, sentenced Suffolk only to an exile of one to five years. If this pleased Suffolk in any way, he was the only one.

The Lords and Parliament wanted a death sentence and wanted to be the ones to make the decision. The public formed a mob to extract justice from Suffolk. When he took to the sea to begin his exile, he was chased by a ship called the Nicholas, equipped with a stock and an axe. A couple of men from this ship boarded the one bearing Suffolk, dragged him onto theirs, and took his life.

The Queen was grief-stricken when she heard the news, even if she'd had a hand in conspiring against Suffolk. His death was not her desire. Alison Weir suggests that she quickly developed designs on avenging the death of her longtime confidante. Rumors that effect began to circulate. The people of the district of Kent believed that the king was going to hold their general populace responsible for Suffolk's death and would raze their villages.

In response, the people of Kent raised a militia, led by one Jack Cade, who liked to be called John Mortimer. After some preliminary skirmishes that set London into a panic, the band chased Henry to the London suburb of Southwark. They had as their grievances not just the notion that Henry would burn their village to avenge Suffolk, but the rampant corruption in the administration. They decried some of the men such as Somerset and Suffolk, outside the royal blood lines, who'd been allowed positions of power. They criticised the collection of goods from citizens and other forms of bribery, among other grievances.

The King decided to call an impromptu hearing of these grievances, but it was too late. The mob roared onto the London Bridge, which had been lowered, and Cade axed the draw cords so the famed structure couldn't be raised. What ensued was a vicious fight at close quarters, that raged all night. Rebels stormed the Tower killing unpopular leaders such as Lord Say and William Crowmer. The band of Cade's rebels were finally stood down when Cardinal Kempe met with them and agreed to issue pardons if they dispersed.

They did so (Cade's pardon was made out to "John Mortimer"), Cade sojourning along the River Thames with a small group of remaining rebels. He was chased down by the Sheriff of Kent, who killed him. He was

beheaded, and not only was his body quartered, but the four parts of it were distributed to cities in which Henry feared other rebellions might spring up.

Cade's rebellion didn't achieve the reforms it sought and it didn't weaken the power of Suffolk or the King or anyone else. It didn't involve members of the House of York, but it sent a shudder down the nation's spine. In addition to causing a general mayhem, it sent a message to those, including members of the House of York, that the King and his party were vulnerable. During a rebellion, the king could be counted on to flee rather than to exercise bravery and poise. Henry had also shown that schemes to undermine a former ally—Suffolk—could drastically backfire, and that a slight hint of avenging the results could cause further bloodshed. He was in a vicious circle of distrust with the public, enraging them first with his corrupt behaviour, and then with his attempts to quell their protests.

There was also a simple question: if people would rebel once for the grievances listed by the people of Kent, and these grievances were still unaddressed, would they rise up in support of a strong leader who promised to address the problems?

3. The Duke of York Has Done This, With His Followers

Incomprehensibly, Richard, Duke of York, was ruler of England. He wasn't the King, but had been named Protector of the Realm after Henry VI had become mentally incapacitated towards the end of 1454.

Months before, Henry VI had fallen ill with alarming suddenness. As was often the case in the Middle Ages, illnesses defied diagnosis and were often given very broad terms. One person in the King's company wrote that his "wit and reason (were) withdrawn." While this may have seemed like a boon to Somerset and other councillors such as the Duke of Norfolk, in reality it was quite the opposite. The people wanted the King to rule, not Somerset or another unpopular senior member of the Court, and certainly not the Queen.

This meant that those closest to the King had to swing into action. They called a summit to work things out, and the King—without wit and reason—invited York to rule, who otherwise would have been excluded. In a way that calls for more historical detail than exists, York was somehow able to convince the Lords to imprison Somerset on grounds of treason. They seemed to have been cowed or confused, or some combination of the two. With Somerset incapacitated, York's only remaining rival was now the Queen. She gave birth to a son at this complicated time, Prince Edward.

Shortly thereafter, Cardinal Kemp, archbishop of Canterbury, died, leaving another crucial position open. Henry was dumbstruck and unable to name a replacement. Amidst the chaos, the Lords of Parliament elected York as Protector, for a term that could possibly last as long as fifteen years, when the newborn Edward would reach his age of majority.

York had felt that his lineage from Lionel of Antwerp, Edward III's second son, gave him a good claim to the throne. He had also served loyally in a military capacity but had found himself on the wrong side of the favoritism contest and was grossly underappreciated. As Lord Protector, he demonstrated that his desire to rule had at its heart a sense of duty to the nation. Rather than beheading all enemies and exploding into debauchery, he took to somber bookkeeping and other necessary administrative duties. He tried to straighten out the crown's financial woes, figuring he'd have a swath of time in which to do so.

But over Christmas 1454, as swiftly as he'd fallen prey to a sort of fugue state, Henry VI snapped out of it. He took a few days to contemplate what had happened, and then began undoing everything that had been done during his mental absence.

This spelled the end of York's time as Lord Protector. Somerset was, of course, released from prison and given some of the posts and titles York had occupied. This was the last straw to York. His hard work to right some of the wrongs of Henry's administration had earned him the role of near-exile. In his mind it was time to raise and army and take what he'd been denied.

York didn't command a large network of people high in society, but he did have a close ally in Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who would soon become a key figure in the wars. Warwick was the son of the Earl of Salisbury, York's brother in law. He was now a wealthy landowner and adept at playing political games. A territorial dispute with Somerset had driven him away from the King's party and into York's fold.

The alliances controlled much of the North and had great support among the populace. Their torts were largely the same as those of the Cade Rebellion several years earlier. In May of 1455, a group of armies led by York and Warwick, more than a thousand men strong, began their march South toward London. Their objective was to take Somerset out of the picture, thus all but destroying the party. York would then be restored to the council and given a chance to govern. The Wars of the Roses, fought as a cold war for a century, would now become a war proper, with military skirmishes.

York's men reached the city of St. Albans and blocked the road running out of town to anticipate the movements of Somerset's troops toward Leicester. In a departure from usual medieval battle, when the opposing sides met, they first went the route of negotiation. On the King's side, the Duke of Buckingham took the role of negotiating with York. York wanted Somerset delivered to him and similar cronies ousted from the King's inner circle, but that was unfeasible. The King, in the midst of the town of St. Albans, had his standard raised and donned his silver battle armor. Meanwhile, on the York side, Warwick's men decided that it was time to get the battle started where they stood at the town's outskirts, and began assaulting Lord Clifford's ranks at the barricades.

York gave up on negotiations, roused his men with a speech, and went to work. He and forces led by the Earl of Salisbury moved towards the heart of the city from the east. The two of them were well defended by Clifford's soldiers, and Warwick came to their defense. The mass of bodies moved into the marketplace in the center of St. Alban's, where a pitched battle ensued.

Warwick's men were catalysts of the midday battle, destroying the royal forces, leaving corpses literally piled in the streets. Reports show that there was a considerable element of cowardice and retreat in the King's forces. King Henry was wounded, but survived. The same cannot be said for Somerset, who died in battle. It was a clear victory for York and his side. An

ambassador to Milan wrote a report of the violence, saying, “The Duke of York has done this, with his followers.” Three days later, he wrote, “Peace reigns. The Duke of York has the government, and the people are very pleased at this.”

This did not mean he “had” the crown, for he escorted the King back to London and placed the crown on his head in a ceremony. What York truly wanted was to be given a high position by the King, not necessarily to depose him. Or at least that was what his outward actions suggested. Alison Weir writes:

'Neither side had wanted an armed conflict…But the divisions between Lancastrians and Yorks were now so profound that it would need a committed effort on both sides to preserve the King’s peace.'

She adds that as York resumed his Protectorate, various lords, such as St. Albans, Buckingham, Pembroke, and one Jasper Tudor spent time trying to develop amiable, or at least sustainable relations between all parties. Indeed, the death of Somerset had been sobering, and the factions seemed committed not to kill off entire blood lines while trying to preserve the crown for those blood lines. They did not, however, stop keeping a watchful eye on each other or stop manoeuvering for advantage.

The wars rolled on as a Cold War, with marriage sometimes used as artillery. An alliance was further cemented when Edmund Tudor, twenty-five, married the twelve year-old Margaret Beaufort, niece of Somerset. This constituted Henry looking to bolster his inner circle and to produce an offspring that would be an heir to the crown, Tudor being Henry’s half-brother.

But this marriage went the way of the best-laid plans of mice and men. Tudor, wounded in battle earlier, and possibly under the effects of an epidemic, died in November of 1456. Lineage was what the marriage had been about, and Margaret, though not quite thirteen at the time, had already been impregnated. She gave birth to Henry Tudor on January 28, 1457, and Edmund’s brother, Jasper took care of the widow and newborn.

4. To Ireland and Back

In 1458 and 1459, Queen Margaret wanted to destroy the Yorkists once and for all. It wasn't her aim to allow Henry VI to rule without threat. Rather, as Weir notes, she went so far as to propose that he abdicate his throne to his son (aged five at the time) as a way of giving the public a symbol around whom to rally. Henry refused. It is unclear how mentally fit he was after his initial bout of derangement, but it's clear that Margaret wanted power, either for herself, for her party, or for future Lancastrians.

More slights and affronts between the two lines ensued, chief among them being York's refusal to attend a Great Council in June of 1459. Both sides had been amassing armed forces, and by this point, it was really war. Preparations were stepped up.

Salisbury, York's right-hand man, raised an army of five thousand, while Warwick raised hundreds, and in September, marched to York's Ludlow Castle to rendezvous with the others.

The Queen leveraged the support of magnates such as Lord Stanley to raise armies. The royal command was headed up by Lord Audley and Lord Dudley. They moved to the North to pre-empt Salisbury's men who were on the attack. The forces met at Blore Heath, a woody marsh near Wales. This was no minor fracas, but a clash of six thousand men under Salisbury against twice that many under Audley. It was the spearmen and archers of Salisbury (with some cannon) against the archers of Audley.

Outnumbered, Salisbury used his military experience, but more crucially, his cunning, to win the day. He manoeuvered his men, in what presumably was meant to resemble a retreat, to the vicinity of a brook that was guarded by banks too steep for the horses. As the Lancastrian vanguard charged forward, many soldiers dismounted and were jumped by Salisbury's men. Meanwhile, the archers lobbed their arrows at trailing forces, disabling many horses and thus, in Weir's prose, 'so unnerved the riders that 500 of them defected at once to the enemy.'

Audley and his line opted for good old-fashioned fleeing; in the pursuit, Dudley was taken prisoner and killed. The second battle in the war had gone, like the first, to the Yorkists.

Yet there was little raising of the gold goblet or the calfskin flask in ribald celebration. The Yorkist attitude after the battle wasn't exultant or over-confident. They'd suffered too much for that: Salisbury's two sons,

commanding forces, had been captured, and all of the armies had seen their numbers drastically cut.

Just a month later, at the battle of Ludford Bridge, one of Warwick's captains surrendered, along with precious manpower, to the King. The battle was a loss for the Yorkists, and after it York put himself into a sort of exile in Ireland. He had to bide his time there for months, knowing that points of re-entry, Wales and the Northern marshes, were controlled by the King.

However, his allies were ready to fight on his—and their—behalf. In June of 1460, Warwick set sail from his sanctuary in Calais back to England. With him were the stalwart Salisbury, and a young, new combatant, Edward, Earl of March, Richard's son. Ahead of them, they'd sent their manifesto, which pledged their disloyalty to the crown and listed their standing grievances against Henry VI. Their forces met those of the king on one of England's green, rolling meadows, this one neighboring the village of Northampton, on July 10.

Buckingham's men making up the crown's defense set themselves up in an awkward position, hemmed in by the River Nene, which was at its high mark and not crossable in case a retreat was needed. What made matters worse that as the midday battle commenced, so did the rain, making soup of the battleground. Buckingham's cannons were soon bogged in mud and ineffective.

Warwick's men bore down on Buckingham's, with Fauconberg, Scrope, and March and Lord Grey leading their platoons. They had orders to kill the Lords, but to capture the King if possible. The battle wouldn't have made for a great Shakespearean play or a movie—the dramatic arcs of swords and thrusts of spears were few. The momentous act was Lord Grey's men tramping over Lancastrian barricades and infiltrating their camp. Presumably improperly drilled or not properly incentivized, the Lancastrians troops turned tail and tried to escape via the Nene, drowning in the process, providing just enough material for one compelling and disturbing film scene. The death toll on the battlefield itself is said to be nearly 400, most of them Lancastrians. Though the battle was brief, it did take a very important casualty: Lord Buckingham.

After the battle, Warwick, March, and Fauconberg were conducted to a modest canvas tent where they found a defeated man, probably in a state of duress, if not some mental confusion: King Henry VI. As was the day's custom, the men bowed before the king and asked his forgiveness for taking up arms against him, before respectfully leading him away as their prisoner.

Though the battle had been far from epic and not terribly bloody, it marked a major turning in the Wars. The King was incapacitated as a ruler, given

temporary board at the bishop's residence. The Queen fled to Scotland.

And then there was York. He had not been a general on the battlefield, but returned triumphantly to London upon hearing about his men's victory. Though his surly entry into the capital was expected, it was, in its substance, shocking. Trumpets and banners led the way, and when York came into view, his wife Cecily at his side, he held a sword before him in a kingly pose.

In a striking scene, York strode into Westminster Hall, making a grand, fashionably late entrance to a parliamentary meeting. The Lords looked on as this slight, raven-haired man took the front of the room, holding his sword poised in front of him, and placed his hand heavily on the King's throne. He swept the room with his eyes, ready to be hailed as a king, and instead found glum and embarrassed faces. He cleared his throat to speak and declared himself the rightful owner of the crown, heir to Richard II. He informed the assembled that he'd be crowned on All Hallows Day, in several weeks. One man straightened to speak, the archbishop of Canterbury. His view was that Richard should probably confer with Henry VI himself on this matter, and Richard became visibly agitated. He then stormed out of the room, on his way to the King's chambers.

This tantrum—more than cinematic—was shocking to all involved. His peers had been, ostensibly, in line with his ideas of reform; but these were men who apologized when taking the king hostage—it wasn't right to try to depose a king who wasn't a tyrant.

5. England Plunged Into Civil War, A York Becomes King

On October 16, Richard of York sat on the throne at Westminster Hall and again declared himself King. This forced the hand of Parliament, who went to the King and asked his wishes, which set off a flurry of deliberations. As a result, the Lords passed the Act of Accord, which stated that while Henry would remain King until his death, his heir would now be York. This meant that York's military victory had resulted in the disinheritance of Edward, son of Henry VI and Queen Margaret. However, York was actually older than Henry, and couldn't have planned to outlive him.

Incensed by this act, Queen Margaret readied herself to storm back from Scotland, but before doing so, she marshaled her key military men to raise armies. She summoned an ominous-sounding "council of war," and made a public protest against York, calling him to take arms. She then instructed her military men to engage in a campaign of pillaging of York's estates. At one point, York's wife sent her young sons Richard and George to Burgundy to be safe. York, for his part, took refuge at Sandal Castle, near the town of Wakefield.

There, he likely roasted some fowl and may have had some wine, celebrating Christmas with his scouts and other men. During the holiday time, he received a visitor, Somerset, who was there to negotiate. The two of them coaxed a New Years' truce that was to last through January 6.

But on Somerset's part, this was just one facet of a multi-layered ruse. The next facet was to send hundreds of his men toward York's fortress disguised as his own men, reinforcements he was expecting, headed up by March. It isn't completely clear, but sometime soon after this, York effectively took the bait and left the castle.

It may have been the case that a foraging party went out and was attacked; another theory is that York fell for the livery the men were wearing; still another is that he saw through the ruse and decided to attack. In any case, the forces overseen by Somerset were too large and too well prepared. York's men who rode out before him were quickly and completely overwhelmed. York was stopped in his tracks as soon as he began to sally forth. Lancastrian forces quickly filled in behind him, leaving him utterly trapped. In short order, the self-styled King was beheaded.

With some Yorkists fighting nobly while outnumbered, others surrendered. Rutland, York's son, was left alive at the end of the battle, until cornered by

Lord Clifford, who screamed “Thy father slew mine! So will I slay the accursed blood of York!” He made good on his word.

One needn’t wonder whether or not the lifeless skulls of York were cruelly displayed on lances: this was medieval England, although, tales of Queen Margaret slapping York’s face are almost certainly apocryphal. Thomas Neville, son of Salisbury was killed as well. The next night, Salisbury himself was murdered by a mob of citizens. This left Warwick with the earldom of Salisbury and, according to Weir, twice the amount of land of anyone in the realm. This made him a powerful ally of the next King of England, York’s son, Edward IV.

The nineteen-year-old Edward was crowned King on March 4, 1461, having received the sort of welcome his father had spent his life chasing. He was not only accepted as the King, but hailed as a hero by the citizenry. He was saving them from the tyranny of the Lancastrians. After losing a skirmish at Mortimor’s Cross in February, the Lancastrians won the seventh battle of the Wars, the Second Battle of St. Albans, and wreaked havoc throughout England, particularly in the North, sacking homes wantonly. When the Queen attempted to enter London, sending carts of food ahead of her, citizens blocked the carts’ progress, saying the Queen wasn’t welcome in their city as long as unsavory “Northern men” were part of her party. This temerity prompted the Queen to order more acts of violence, which made it harder for her and her now non compos mentis husband to safely return to London. The grass roots movement of the people was remarkable, nearly breathtaking. On their say, the gates to the city were firmly closed to the Queen and the King.

Enter Edward, who, in the absence of Margaret, was ready to ride into town. He sent a messenger ahead to reiterate the threat of Margaret’s minions robbing the city, which was as opposed to his men’s intentions of protecting it. The city’s citizens naturally embraced Edward, going so far as to send him funds to facilitate his entry. He certainly didn’t lack for men: he entered the city with 20,000 knights and 30,000 soldiers, to the throngs’ shouts of “Hail to the Rose of Rouen!”

In short, the people made it clear they wanted him as the king. His claim was sound: the accords had made his father the heir to crown, which means by killing him, the Lancastrians had deposed an heir to the crown. To put it another way, claims that York had made to the crown based on blood applied to Edward as well. A group of magnates petitioned the Lords and Commons to hand the crown to Edward and that is what happened. The group’s leader, Warwick, would become known as The Kingmaker.

One needn’t wonder whether or not Edward’s ascent was soon challenged. An armed conflict, constituting the eighth battle of the wars, broke less than a

month after Edward had been on the throne. Realizing the deposed Queen, now in the North at, ironically, York, was raising an army, Edward endeavored to nip the uprising in the bud, and raised his own forces, which he marched toward that city.

The meeting of the two armies was on the Great North Road, first near Ferrybridge on the 28th, with the violence spilling over the next day into the larger battle, the Battle of Towton.

It was fitting that when morning broke in Towton that day, it revealed a ghastly sight. First, the earth was snowed over and frozen. Second, an alien sky stared down at the bewildered legions of soldiers. There were three suns. Historian and author George Goodwin writes, "the sun shining through the ice crystals created the effect of a mirror and those below saw it twice reflected." He adds that King Edward considered this to be a blessing from the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on himself and his younger brothers George and Richard III.

Whether or not there was any real advantage in this superstitious motivator, the Yorkists had a couple of other advantages. Goodwin explains that another force of nature, wind, was on the side of York. In short, his archers had their wind to their backs, which lengthened their range and shortened that of the Lancastrians. The sleet that the wind shot into the faces of the Lancastrians didn't help them either. What they had going for them was their elevated position, which of course gave them a panoramic view, with the hardship of the York's having to charge uphill.

Once the battle began, the wind took its toll in terms of archery, ruining the Lancastrians' aim. As their foes' arrows struck their targets only too often, the Lancastrians found that the Yorkists were collecting the Lancasters' off-mark arrows and were firing them back.

It was then that the Lancastrians decided to charge through the blinding snow into the meadow and attack. Each army had begun the day with roughly 25,000 men, and the scrimmage in the meadow would drag on for hours, becoming what is to this day one of the most terrible and gory battles in English history. The once snow-white ground on which they fought would become termed the Bloody Meadow.

Axes and swords swung mercilessly, each side inflicting horrors on the other, seeming to fight to a sort of stalemate for hours. Bodies piled on the ground and fresh soldiers came in as replacements. Eventually, the Yorkists gained ground and got the better of their enemies. Reinforcements arrived from Saxton and tore a gash into the Lancastrian left flank.

Mass retreat and chase ensued, hundreds of men stampeding onto a bridge

across a stream called the Cock Beck. When this bridge snapped, hundreds were killed, many suffering the further indignity of being trampled by horses.

Among the Lancastrians' slain were Lord Neville, Sir Andrew Trollope, and Northumberland, several of their most talented leaders. Each side suffered a high death toll, and the mass burial mounds attest to the fact that the battle was a large-scale atrocity.

6. Richard III

After the tragic loss of thousands of lives at Towton, Edward settled into his role as king. His rule would last some twenty-two years. Like his father, Edward demonstrated real diligence and an earnest desire to improve the lot of his country. What today is called fiscal responsibility was one of his first objectives. He then helped England's economic situation by backing many lucrative international ventures. Later in his reign, he put in place a peace accord with King Louis of France.

He was smart and ambitious, and married to the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville, yet, like many monarchs, restless to enjoy some of the spoils of the office: he strayed from his marriage bed and was known as a prolific indulger of food and drink. Dominic Mancini, an Italian who chronicled much of the lives of some of England's royalty during this era, wrote that Edward would "take an emetic for the delight of gorging his stomach once more." Mancini added that as a result, "he had grown fat in the loins." Anthony Cheetham's candid analysis is, "in this curious blending of energy with laziness, ability with self-indulgence, Edward's character foreshadows that of his Tudor successor, Henry VIII."

The energy and ability, particularly early in his reign, was also transferred to the battlefield. He was tall and strong, and like his father, adept in the ways of fighting. He quickly enlisted the aid of his brother, Richard, to contribute to the warrior exploits of the family and help him defend his crown. Richard, at that point the Duke of Gloucester, is well-known for being short and possessed of a sallow face. But, pressed into service as a teenager, and knowing nothing of life but his family attacking and being attacked, he soon became a good warrior.

While Edward's rule involved a soon-to-be explained hiatus in the Wars, it did begin with, in addition to the bloodbath at Towton, a few armed skirmishes. Richard was involved in Yorkist victories at Hedgely Moor in April 1464, Hexham in May and Losecote Field in 1470. The only loss during this period was at Edgecot Moor in 1469. However, as discussed throughout, the cold war elements of the Wars, those things that took place off the battlefield were both dramatic and corrosive to the relationships of the combatants.

Richard and Edward fought one of these protracted battles with a man who began as Edward's greatest champion: Warwick. The two had their first falling out when Edward secretly married the dashing widow Woodville. According to Cheetham, Edward did so to access what in those times was

called her "virtue." But, more to the point, this ran contrary to Warwick's plan for Edward to marry into the French royal family. As a sort of envoy to the king, Warwick had taken it upon himself to pursue negotiations with Louis XI for a treaty that would make the two nations amicable allies. For his reward, Warwick would receive land and estates, and all that was necessary on his end was a marriage between Edward and a member of the French royal family. The marriage to Woodville didn't fit in to these plans.

And neither did the marriage between Edward's sister, Margaret, and Charles of Burgundy. Edward's forming this alliance with Burgundy rather than France constituted the last straw for Warwick. Older than Edward, who had had little preparation for his kingship, Warwick had thought of himself as a mentor to Edward, a kingmaker, but if his diplomatic efforts weren't appreciated, he could rise up against the man he'd helped to the throne.

The way in which he did so entailed another stunning betrayal and one of the most dramatic examples of backstabbing in the Wars. Needing an ally, Warwick found one in George, the Duke of Clarence, Edward's brother. The two of them mounted a series of small armed rebellions which caused Edward to marshal his own forces, which usually included Richard, now "the king's man."

At one point, Warwick and his rebels actually captured Edward, but didn't have the fortitude to face the civil disorder that broke out as a result. Rather than deposing him, they let him go.

But that didn't mean the fighting was over. Aligned with various Lancastrian forces, Warwick would make armed attempts at dethroning Edward on several occasions. Just after the birth of his son, Edward, the king had to delve into the breach once again. Strangely, during this engagement of the enemy, Edward towed along the sickly King Henry, still hanging in but not of sound mind, who he'd been keeping as a prisoner in the tower.

His forces were led by him, Richard, and Lord Hastings. The foe was led by the 13the Earl of Oxford, John Neville Montague (formerly Northumberland, having had his Earldom rescinded), the Duke of Exeter, and Warwick. While the battle of Towton had been beset by nasty sleet and snow, the battle of Barnet was vexed by dense fog, the armies engaging in hand in hand combat in half-blindness.

As the battle raged on, Edward was receiving assurances from messengers that Richard's flank would hold out, something he was counting on. The final blow was delivered when Richard's men met up with Edward's, closing in on the Lancastrians from either side, causing a mass retreat. Montague was killed in this final surge; more crucially, Warwick was slain by pursuing Yorkists after he left the battlefield.

After this landmark victory, the next battle of the Wars was at Tewksbury. While this was merely weeks after Barnet, the Queen had new forces to deploy, since she was using men led by Jasper Tudor. Her forces reached Tewksbury on May 3, planning to cross the Severn River and head into Wales.

Somerset's Lancastrian forces lined up on a hill at the south of town. In a matter of hours, Edward's army had arrived about 600 yards to the south of them. In addition to the Big Three—the King, Richard, and Hastings, the forces were led by the Marquess of Grey, the King's stepson.

Richard scored the first big victory of the morning, raining arrows down on Somerset's men, and then leading them down a hill where they crashed into the King's left flank. While being thus engaged, Somerset was also attacked from the rear by the King's reinforcements. Somerset's forces waged a losing battle, waiting for aid from forces led by Sir John Wenlock. This never came, and the men were routed. Somerset escaped alive, made a bee-line for Wenlock, called the man a traitor, and decapitated him.

Prince Edward, son of Henry VI and Queen Margaret was also cut down in battle that day. As for Somerset and other Lancastrian leaders such as Sir Hugh Courtenay and Sir John Langstrother, the King himself chased them to Tewkesbury Abbey, where they'd been given sanctuary, dragged them away and had them beheaded.

It was a stunning victory for the King, and Richard was given the honor of leading the victory procession back into London. After a rousing celebration, Edward met with advisors and agreed that the next act was to end the life of King Henry VI, who still sat in the tower. While one line of thought propagated by historians was that the delirious King was pushed over the edge by the news of his son, it is also the case that Richard was definitely in the Tower that night, and it is also believed, with no detail, that he ended the former King's life. The body was buried at Chertsey Abbey.

The death of Henry and his heir, as well as Somerset and the decisive Tewkesbury victory, seemed to end the wars. Inevitably, the Queen was inconsolable and not interested in raising more forces. The mayhem of the last decades had taken a toll on the nation, and, in short, the man thought of as best suited for holding order was firmly in power, seeming to have proven himself beyond challenge. Many supporters of the Lancastrians, forlorn, rid of hope, simply went over to the other side.

Edward went on to rule for a decade in peace, with no challenges to his crown. His reign was marked by diplomacy with France briefly mentioned above and by economic prosperity. But in 1483, he died suddenly, leaving his son, another Prince Edward, to the throne.

This meant that England was again thrown into the breach of a minority rule: Edward V was just twelve years old. The man chosen to be his regent was, of course, Richard, still Duke of Gloucester. Richard had been a loyal and valuable warrior on his brother's behalf, and had been known to be diligent, faithful, and effective in his duties. But with Edward no longer alive, as his father had done in his childhood, Richard decided that enough was enough and that the crown should be his.

The War of the Roses was a civil war, but also a war within the different branches of the Plantagenet line. What often gets lost is the viciousness within nuclear families or between close relatives within one of the branches. Richard's acts immediately upon becoming the Lord Protector until Edward V was ready to rule were a spectacular example of this.

He incomprehensibly ordered the boy on whose behalf he was supposed to rule to be cloistered in the Tower, along with his brother. Next, he pushed back the boy's coronation and arranged for his own. He would become another usurper.

Before long the two boys disappeared, never to be found, and Richard assumed rule. Over the years, more and more primary texts were unearthed and more and more theories about Richard's role in the boys' disappearance were constructed. Today, it is almost universally thought that Richard ordered the two boys killed. One prominent source is the confession of a James Tyrell, one of Richard's Knights of the Body, who gave details of having the deed carried out by two of his (Tyrell's) men.

Naturally, this shocking act has dominated perceptions of Richard since then, leading to his portrayal as an arch-villain. This over-simplification of his character has in turn led later writers to look for a more complex version of Richard.

We know he committed many acts of generosity as a King, and was known to walk the countryside personality giving financial help to the poor. But, as we'll see, his reign was very brief.

7. Henry Tudor

Richard had a counterpart in Henry Tudor. Both boys were born into the violence of the Wars, and both knew the disorienting experience of being sent into exile to escape the treachery that raged around them. While Richard lived much of his life fatherless, Henry lived all of his in that state—his father, Edmund, died while his mother, Margaret Beaufort, was pregnant with him.

The Beauforts were, of course, stalwarts in the Lancaster line. Edmund was the son of Catherine de Valois and Owen Tudor, under scandalous circumstances. De Valois was the wife of Henry V and mother of Henry VI (whose blood line ended at Tewkesbury with the death of Prince Edward) and entered into an illicit marriage with Tudor.

While in exile with his uncle, Jasper, Henry began to seethe and to come to the conclusion that as the best Lancastrian heir to the throne, he should seize the crown from Richard III. Clearly, Richard himself was a sort of usurper, even if he wasn't taking the crown from a different branch of the family. He seemed to be walking on egg shells with an English public who was uneasy about what may or may not happened—or be yet to happen—to the sons of Edward IV. It was time to revive the Wars of the Roses.

Richard, who had tried to ink a treaty with France to achieve the release of Henry, issued a proclamation to his land stating that Tudor was "contrary to truth, honour, and nature" and that he had no "manner, interest, right of colour" as far as the Realm of England was concerned.

He raised an army, as had Tudor. In the summer of 1485, Henry and Jasper landed in England, breaking their exile, and began trooping across the English countryside, finding supporters. Richard marched to Nottingham, learned the course his adversary was taking, and struck out toward him on a trajectory that would cause the two to meet near the village of Leicester.

The military leaders Richard had with him were John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and Henry Percy, 4th Earl of Northumberland, men who'd been at his side (a few twists and turns aside) for years. On the morning of August 21, Richard gave his men a speech proclaiming the end, once and for all, of Tudor, and led them into battle, astride his white charger.

The troops were stationed on ridges and hills that encircled a large marsh, called Bosworth Field. The battle began when Tudor troops led by the Earl of Oxford arrived and began trading arrow volleys with Richard's men. Hand to

hand combat ensued, but this would not be a marathon war that stained the battlefield crimson. Who knows how long the battle may have raged if not for the definitive and shocking end Richard put to it.

While some of the troops were repositioning, creating a lull, a messenger told Richard he thought he'd found the man that must be Tudor. Richard presumably burst into a state of pique upon hearing this, and decided to take out his challenger immediately. He gathered up some of the men of his household and led them into a charge that he had to have known was impossible, into a much larger Tudor defense.

On his white steed, he charged across the marsh, his small force behind him. As he encountered Tudor's ranks, he began to flail savagely with his battleaxe. The first man he cut down was Sir John Cheyney, a hulking soldier. Paul Murray Kendall muses that Tudor must have been struck by the ferocity of Richard's assault and must have been disturbed and possible afraid —though there was a surfeit of men around Tudor, all Richard had to do was find daylight with his sword and inflict a wound. But, Kendall states, Tudor wouldn't have wanted to send the wrong message to his men by recoiling or fleeing.

He wouldn't have to worry about it for long. Richard left his horse and surged forward still, but in short order, too many of Tudor's men had swarmed him. Blows rained down on Richard and took him swiftly to his end. He was stripped of his crown, armor, and clothing, slung onto a horse, and dragged off the battlefield.

Imagine the mix of wonder, elation, and perhaps pure shock that Tudor must have felt. He was part of a line of Lancastrians that sprang up from a secret marriage, Owen Tudor being less connected than most men to be wed to royalty. Tudor had lived during a long, stable rule, that of Edward VI at a time when Lancastrian aspirations to the throne seemed dim. The new king was Edward's son, and he was swiftly replaced by Richard. In less than two years, Tudor had gone from an exiled nobody on the fringes of the Lancaster blood line to being King.

The Wars were over. Tudors would rule England for just over a hundred years. No longer would civil wars and rebellions rage over which branch would rule. To be sure, the Tudors themselves fought over the crown and wreaked plenty of chaos on the realm. Henry VIII would usher in the Protestant Reformation as a way of ending his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. Catherine I would bring England's Navy into global prominence.

The Wars went a long way in creating a paradigm of the machinations of royal families. Intrigues, infidelities, shifts in alliance, betrayals, and assassinations are all paramount, as foibles of the royal-born, and this owes a

lot to the Roses era. While these bloody wars made as good a case as any for democratically elected leaders, to this day the monarchy exists in England, and interest in the Boleyn sisters, Henry VIII, and the War of the Roses are as keen as ever. It isn't hard to see why. The actions of the many people involved were equal parts brazen, courageous, reprehensible, and shocking.

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